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UNSUNG LEGEND

AN INTERVIEW WITH HALL OF FAME
POWERLIFTER STEVE GOGGINS

BY JOHN GREAVES III

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KAELA KENNEDY

Steve Goggins is one of the unsung heroes of the Iron Game. Despite tough battles against legends such as Ed Coan and Kirk Karwoski, Goggins has remained relatively unknown despite decades of record setting performances. He was the first to squat 1102 lbs in competition at a bodyweight of 263 lbs! He was also the first to squat 500 kilos and pull 400 kilos in the same meet and the first 242-pound and under lifter to squat 1000 lbs.

While he didn't win every competition, for years, Goggins seemed invulnerable. To quote Elite FTS CEO, Dave Tate, "In over thirty years of powerlifting, roughly a quarter century of that handling weights in excess of 800lbs, he's never suffered a serious injury. Never."

If this were a comic book, the streak would continue unbroken. But even a tank occasionally needs repairing. In 2000, Goggins' left hip began to bother him. Still, he continued to lift heavy. Two years ago, at 49 years old, Goggins pulled an 800lb raw deadlift but was already suffering from a degenerative disc disorder as well as arthritis.

In February of 2015, he underwent surgery to replace the bad hip. After such a monumental career, many lifters would rest and enjoy the fruits of their labor. Instead, Goggins turned his focus to his other passion, which was passing his wealth of hard won knowledge onto the next generation of young lifters. But that doesn't mean he has hung up his own singlet yet.

I caught up to Goggins at his home in Marietta, Georgia where we listened to Barry White and Michael Jackson while discussing his phenomenal career, his thoughts on the state of powerlifting and his plans to return to the competition platform.



Hello Mr. Goggins, thanks for giving me this interview. To start off, how old are you right now?

I'm 51.

Until recently, you didn't get as much notice as some of your contemporaries. So, for those who don't know you and your stats, how tall are you and what weight classes did you compete in?

I'm 5'8" and I competed in the 242lb class during my last few years competing. Also, I dabbled in the 275lb class in the WPO [World Powerlifting Organization] but my main class was 242 - early on, it was 220.

What are some of your accomplishments in powerlifting?

COMPETITION LIFTS (Equipped)

Squat: 1102 lbs. in the 275 class - I was weighing 260-263 and that was while dressed and finished eating. This was because I was underweight trying to make 275. I just ate, got dressed and weighed in that morning. I squatted 1045 at 242.

Bench: 600lbs

Deadlift: 881 lbs.



GYM LIFTS

Squat: 800 lb. raw training squat

Bench: 520

Deadlift: 950 lbs. with straps (exhibition lift)

Were you playing sports as a kid? What made you start lifting?

I played football in high school - I

was a running back. I wanted to get stronger for football. I basically went on from there just trying to be stronger. I was the strongest one on my football team.

You started training with a 90 lb. weight set your mom bought you, right?

When I was twelve, I remember that I was crying. I remember it was close to Christmas and I said, "Mama, I want a weight set for Christmas." My mother said "I don't want you to get hurt".

I was like, "I won't get hurt. I just want to get strong for sports!" So it just broke my heart and I cried.

Later on, I thought about it and decided to just keep begging her. So, I kept asking her and asking her and she finally broke down and bought it for me.

So she just got tired of seeing you with your lip stuck out and she gave in?

Exactly! Plus, [we were living in] the country so we didn't have anything else to do. I stuck car rims on that weight set. It wasn't just the 90lb set. - after I advanced, I stuck brake drums and everything on that weight set.

What drew you from football to the sport of powerlifting?

I wanted to be strong and also, it was seeing the other guys in the sport on ABC Wide World of Sports, watching a little bit of that, seeing Eddie Pengelly, Kaz. Those guys would come on TV and it got me motivated.

Who were some of your mentors in the sport of powerlifting? Who taught you the ropes?

I can't really say that I had any mentors per se. I trained in a YMCA in Virginia and I had a couple of guys that I ran past [training philosophies] every now and then but we really didn't train together. It was Ivan Menno, William Link - those

types of guys pretty much mentored me. I would just look out there and see who was the strongest [lifter] and I always had a goal to be stronger. I was watching guys like John Gamble, and other big time guys in Virginia, lift. Seeing that, and like I said, watching Wide World of Sports, that got me into it more than anything. I always just wanted to be the best I could be. But I never really gravitated towards one individual as far as having a mentor or anything. As far as heroes, James "Hollywood" Henderson, the first man to bench over 700lbs Raw, was someone I admired because he turned his life around with weights and held a lot of IPF [International Powerlifting Federation] records.

What do you think about today's shift over to Raw powerlifting?

Well, my honest opinion is that raw is fine. The thing about gear is that the people who make it need to keep it consistent and stop trying to make it better. Just make it so that it's safe, like it was when it first came in the sport. I mean, gear was supposed to make it [lifting] safe, give you a little bit of help and that's all. You'd get thirty or forty pounds and if you mastered it, you'd get forty or fifty. Nowadays you might get three hundred pounds out of a single ply shirt!

Have you ever competed Raw?

Yeah, but not enough. It wasn't in my era. But if it was in my era, I would have competed in it a lot. Just seeing the way guys are doing it now and enjoying it - I love it. If I was in this era [of raw lifting], I would compete with them raw. I mean, our gear wasn't too much better than raw is anyway. In the long run, it's all about who's the strongest, not who has the best equipment.

What organizations have you competed in and where do you

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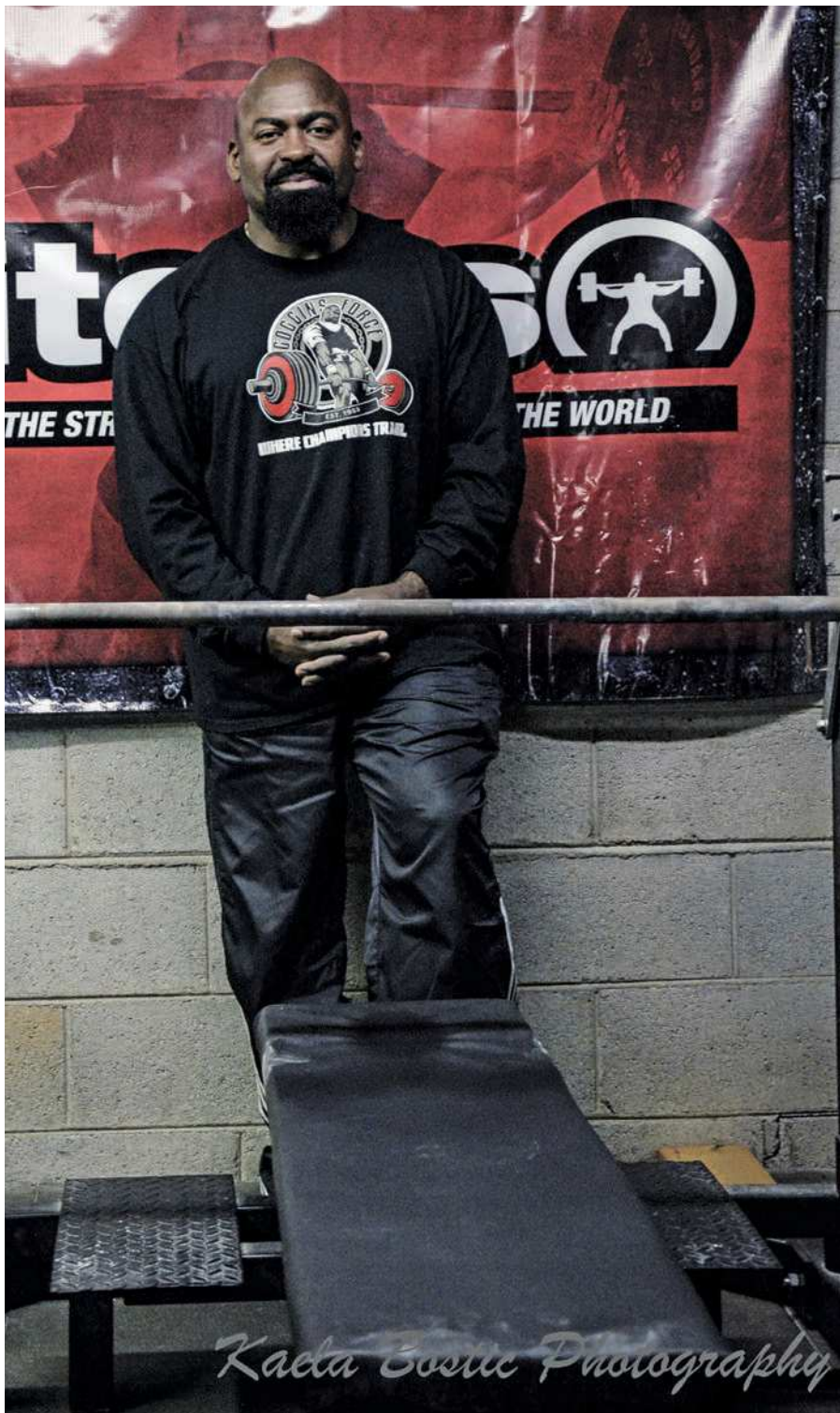
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for the best lifters to compete head to head. Do you think that events like the annual Raw Unity Meet are a step in the right direction?

I do. I think they started off in the right direction. I think if themselves as well as the other meet directors can get it right, so that you don't have the same type of meets on the same day of the year, you can get more people on the same platform at the same time

So do you favor something like a tournament system?

Yes! That's what it should be. That's what State, Nationals and Worlds used to be until we got too many organizations. People don't care about Nationals, they just want to go to a meet and get a total. It used to be that you would go to the State meet trying to qualify for Nationals. You wanted to win Nationals so you had a shot at going to the Worlds. Whether it was APF Worlds, IPF Worlds, you wanted to go to Nationals and place high. Even if you didn't win, you wanted to place high. Nationals meant a lot to us. If you went to Nationals and lost, you were depressed. Nowadays, they don't care. That's what should change - make the meets so that they mean something. Not that powerlifting isn't great, it's totally awesome! We just need to find a way to make it so that everybody's not a champion. You have forty people in a meet and you have forty first place trophies. You have some people who go to the meet trying to enter every class just to get a medal. That's like giving those trophies in school - the participation trophies? We're too grown up for that.

Shifting gears, there are stories from the old days about guys getting together, drinking and deciding to just throw weight on the bench and start training. What are some stories from back then

plan to compete if and when you return to the platform?

I've done WPC [World Powerlifting Commission], APF [American Powerlifting Federation], WPA [Word Powerlifting Alliance], USPF [United States Powerlifting Federation], WPO and IPF. As far as if I do get to come back from rehabbing this hip sur-

gery? When I come back, I'll probably do bench only, some deadlift. I don't know if I'll ever compete in a full meet again. I just want to pull some big deadlifts. I want to pull 800 again, while having fun. And it'll probably be in the USPA.

You've said in the past that you like the idea of having a platform

that nobody knows about that you can reveal? The statute of limitations is up, so now's your chance to drop dimes on people!

I don't know if I have any [stories]. There's a couple that are told about me, but none that I have on anybody else. Um, that's a good question. I'd have to think about that. I'll have to come back to that one.

But you did have some memorable battles on the platform? Which ones stand out the most to you and who were your toughest competitors?

I first started out and battled Jim Cash during Senior Nationals when I was on the Armed Forces Powerlifting Team. That was a good battle. After that, I'm going to say, I had a couple of battles with Kirk Karwoski - I had a couple of mistakes. I won one and he definitely won a big one over me! That was a very big one. I think that was the biggest one I ever lost. The night before weigh-in, I had a friend of mine tell me to take some Epsom Salts to try to cut weight. That's not the most memorable battle, but it means the most. Other ones would be against Willie Wessels, APF Senior Nationals. I hit the 1032 record squat there. At that time, that 1032 was the most that had ever been squatted. Also another one was going against Ed Coan at the Mountaineer Cup but because he blew his knee out, it kind of let the sails out of that. That would have been the most meaningful. That was the one.

You mentioned Captain Kirk and you mentioned Ed Coan among your memorable battles. Those are guys that most powerlifters look up to. Are those some of the names you feel you should be considered on par with?

Oh definitely, because there wasn't anybody else underneath me and them! It just depended on

where you competed. I was young, so I made some mistakes. I made some coaching errors as well as some mistakes in coaching myself. I think that has made me a better coach today because I didn't always coach myself the best that I possibly could have. I could have done a lot better if I'd had somebody like me now, advising me on what to do, how to pick first attempts, second attempts, or how to pick training attempts. It would have been better.

You got inducted into the York Barbell Hall of Fame last fall. When it first happened, you were almost speechless. Has it sunk in to you that you're in the Hall of Fame?

That was pretty awesome - that was an amazing feeling. Being voted in with everybody else along with those guys, I mean, for a long time I wanted to be in that same spotlight with them. I wanted to be respected as they were. It felt like it took a long time to get to that point. At some points, I felt like I would never get there. I always respected them but it seemed for a while that I didn't get the respect that I deserved. It felt like this for years and years in the sport when I was really at my best. It came later on, so I mean, it really means a whole lot especially because I worked really hard and I know how good I was and I know how hard it was to get there.

So, everyone looking at your career sees what you're doing now and maybe some remember what you did when you first started out. But what did your training look like as an intermediate lifter? In other words, what did you have to do to get from being a pretty good lifter to being a great lifter? If you look at meet results, there are lot of guys squatting in the 5s, deadlifting in the sixes.

You don't have a ton of guys squatting in the sixes and sevens and deadlifting in the sevens or eights. What does it take to clear that hurdle?

Really, just to stay at it day in day out - paying attention to your body. When I got to the point where I was as an intermediate lifter, I knew I could be great because I kept making gains. Each time I went into the gym, I made gains. So my mindset was to stay consistent. Every now and then, I'd hit a wall and I'd take a de-load day. The only time I'd take a de-load day was when I got to the gym and I couldn't do what I wanted to do. I'd get mad, pack my bag and leave the gym. I couldn't take time off - your competition is already up here and if you're making gains, they're making gains too. So you don't have time to waste! When you're sitting at home reading stuff and you see your competition being called the greatest, your mindset is that you've got to go train!

Do you think that having good technique allowed you to keep hammering at it and not get hurt?

I really do, even though I had my own special techniques. I think my deadlift was pretty much flawless and my squat - I had my own special technique even though some people thought it was wrong. I think it was the best way you could do it. And that's one thing that worked for me - my squat helped my deadlift and my deadlift helped my squat. In turn, I did assistance work that worked for both and it made both lifts flourish.

Speaking of special technique, in your most famous lift, you squatted 1102. You did that while using technique some people would say is incorrect or might question. (Steve descends to a certain point and when he gets to about parallel, he then bends

at the waist and almost puts his chest on his thighs. After hitting bottom, he then has enough back strength to stand erect with the weigh.) How important is it for someone to identify the best way for their body to do a lift as opposed to what the cookie cutter, YouTube form Nazis might try to push on people?

I used to call my squat wrong but I was the strongest one squatting that way. You know, I used a lot of back and a lot of hamstrings and I knew how to use my whole body and not just my quads. So I'm going to say it was not wrong. After studying it for years, I started to break down how others squat and now I see that it's not as bad as I thought it was. It's actually excellent.

And it carried over to your deadlift correct?

Yes, exactly.

I think you told Steve Colescott in an interview that it's harder to hit depth now because of your squat style. How does that fit with what you're saying?

I think that during the last five or six years, it was hard for me to hit depth because my hip was going bad. I didn't really know that's what it was. It just kept tightening up and tightening up, so I wanted to believe it wasn't that and I thought I could fix it.

And that's partly because, in twenty years, you had never been injured. So, you had no reason to believe it was anything serious?

Right. In twenty years, I haven't had anything that would keep me out of the gym for more than until the next workout. You know what I mean? I had an IT [Iliotibial] band strain but that's it.

And now you recently had hip replacement surgery. You said you suffer from arthritis and degenerative disc disease. How

did it affect you mentally to go through such a long career without injuries then all of a sudden, bam you need surgery?

Man, its tough! I guess because I never had it happen. I mean, I know where I am in my career and I know I'm not who I used to be anyway. At some point, you've got to realize that I can't pull 400 kilos anymore, even if I was to be 100 percent [injury free]. I mean, I think I can still pull 365 kilos though!

Yeah, because it hasn't been that long since you pulled 800lbs at an Elite FTS Learn to Train seminar.

Oh yeah, I think I can still go back and pull 800. I'll say, mark the calendar, give me a year and I'll pull 800 again. After ten months, surgery and time to train, I'll pull 800 again. There's no doubt in my mind. They said there's no restrictions on this hip thing, so why not?

Speaking of deadlifts and assistance work, Dave Tate said that you were one of the few people he has ever seen do a rack pull correctly. You've done over 1000lb rack pulls. What's different about the way you approach the rack pull compared to how you see others do it?

Most people try to pull the bar up their legs. They lean back and try to slide the bar up their legs. The way you do a rack pull is that you stand over the bar with your feet directly under the bar like the bar was on the ground. You pull the bar straight up and you push your hips inward. Of course, your chest comes up but you don't need to lay five inches back or you're not simulating the deadlift and you won't get the carryover that you need from the rack pull. You do it like you're finishing up a deadlift. You don't need to lay back like you're laying in the bed.

Some lifters like to get fired

up for their attempts while some guys are calmer. What's your take on how to best mentally prepare for attempts in competition and how is it different from preparing to do a lift in training?

There is no difference. I try to get as emotionally motivated as possible -whatever it takes to get the lifter fired up for the lift.

Let's talk about coaching athletes. How is your training different as a coach than what you did/do for yourself?

I back off a lot with them. If I see something I don't like, I'll just drop down. They'll always go, "I'm okay though" and I say no. Sometimes, I've trusted them to push it and it didn't work out. You get one chance and after that, I say no - I know what's going on and we do it my way.

Many old school lifters preferred linear periodization. Is this a style of training you prefer or do you play around with conjugate programming or is it all instinctive? What's your approach to programming for yourself and your lifters?

I like linear periodization and instinctive [programming]. I'm very instinctive - I go based on what I feel and what I see.

Do you still prefer to hit a heavy single then drop back down to heavy triples with your athletes?

I do the heavy singles sometimes, but it depends on the lifter, where we're at in the cycle, whether we're in the off season and how heavy we need to go. It also depends on what's on the agenda and what has worked for them in the past. I'll test that style on people and if it doesn't seem to work, I'll move on and try something else. I'm never stuck on one certain thing. For example, are they weak in the hamstrings? I can't do heavy singles to address that. For

that, I need reps.

A lot of lifters want to be strong in six months. How long do you think it realistically should take, say a 198lb lifter, to hit a 500 Squat, 400 Bench, 600 Deadlift with good training, recovery, if they remain injury free?

It depends on what he could do before. If he wants to squat 500 and he can squat 450, it depends on the person - depends on their genetics. We can work him, work him and work him. In six months to a year, he could hit those numbers. Depends on the work ethic, consistency, how good their coach is and whether they pay attention to him. It takes consistency from both the coach and the lifter.

And would you say the same for women?

That goes for women and men. I have an easier time training women

because they listen better - they do exactly what you say. I have some guys who listen too, but it's easier with women because they don't question you, they believe in you. Guys sometimes don't see you as trustworthy but when you get the ones that do, they flourish. Then once they see results, you've got them. Some ask you for your opinion, then go and do their own thing anyway. That doesn't work. You got to have them 100 percent! And that's what I demand of all the people I coach.

How do you identify weak points?

I'm looking at how the hips shoot up, how the body moves and if the body is in the right position when the bar gets to a certain place. If your head's not in the right place when the bar gets to a certain spot, I'm saying stuff like, "squeeze your

hips forward" or "keep your head up". Depending on the person, I might say, "keep your head neutral" if it's a squat. Flex your hips before you start, squeeze your butt in. I would say that's my strong point. It's hard to explain - I would have to see a lifter doing it and then I could tell you what they're doing wrong.

As an Elite FTS athlete you have access to a lot of toys. A lot of those developed in order to help Dave Tate train around his own injuries. What special training equipment do you like?

I like the Safety Squat Bar and the new shoulder saver they have - that's one of my favorites. As far as accessory toys, I'm pretty old school. I mean most of my accessories are that I stand on a block. I don't like too many specialty bars, like the bamboo bar. I'm not saying it's not good - it just hasn't worked for me.

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I think bands and chains are definitely good. There's definitely a place for it in the sport, if you learn how to do it right. We don't use it as much in training with my team, Goggins Force, because it takes a lot of time to set some of that stuff up. And if I do it, I want to do it throughout the whole cycle and sometimes we just don't have the time. Not that I wouldn't do it, it's just that there's so many meets coming up and so many tools that you might never get to use them and that's okay!

We got stronger never having used those tools and the whole point is to get strong. It's not necessary - we didn't use it in the old school and the Europeans don't use it and they're beasts. As long as you change up the rep scheme and all of that, that's all that matters. But if you're a person who gets bored or you have the opportunity to use it, then yeah, use it.

Your team is Goggins Force. Who are some of the members of Goggins Force?

I don't want to forget anybody, there are a lot of them. So as not to single anyone out, members of the team can be seen at gogginsforce.com under lifter profiles.

One Goggins Force member who I want to talk about is Canadian National IPF Record Holder, Meana Franco. How is the experience been of taking her from Novice to National Champion so quickly? She had only done one bench competition then in a short time, she's at Nationals competing and doing well. How was it to take somebody and duplicate some of what happened with you early in your career?

It feels great because then they come back and tell you, "thank you so much". Over three or four weeks, a couple months, three months, they'll actually notice the changes

they're making. They'll come back and kind of review it by saying things like, "I can't believe I'm making these gains. Before I couldn't do this, couldn't do that". So it feels awesome to hear them say that they're steadily getting better. That's the whole point - if you can't get them better, I feel like I'm failing them. I take pride in helping somebody train. If they're not getting better then you don't want to hold on to somebody if you're not doing them justice.

So she's just one of your lifters who you do programming for online. How different is it to train somebody online vs having them right in front of you where you can give immediate feedback as they train? How do you handle not being able to give physical cues when necessary for example?

You have to get them to understand what you're saying. You have to type those words in some bold print sometimes -all caps or whatever. You get them to understand what you're saying and go "Look! This is what I need you to do. I need you to do this, I need you to block out everything else that's around you. We're going to do this on your warm up sets from the beginning when we start this next session all the way up. I want to see this on each one of your warm up sets and I want you to video them and I want to see you do each one of them correctly before we go on to heavy weights". And we just work it that way because I've got to be on top of it to make sure it's going right the whole time.

Aside from the lifters you coach, is there anybody you admire in the sport now? Who do you like to watch?

Oh, there's plenty of people I admire. I like to watch Eric Lilliebridge - I like some other lifters too but I don't want to leave anyone out. You

have Maliek Derstine - he's a young guy, 181 pounder. You have Kimberly Walford, she's one of my favorites to watch. There's quite a few of them.

Here's the most important question of this interview. Tee "Skinny Man" Meyers has claimed that your goatee is a hair weave! Is there any truth to this statement? The readers deserve to know the truth!

Tee is crazy. We go way back from when we were at Fort Hood, TX. He was on my team and I used to coach him back then. He's a great athlete and a great guy - a trip. I can't say anything about him. I can't think of anything good enough to top him.

Well, very few people can out-talk Tee Meyers, so no worries.

How do you want to be remembered by generations to come?

As one of the strongest of all-time. Training hard, doing my best, passing my knowledge on to others. Not to be average.

Are there any sponsors you'd like to thank or anybody you'd like to recognize before we close?

I'd like to give a shout out to anyone who's representing Goggins Force; that's what means the most to me right now - my team. Of course I'd like to recognize Elite FTS as my sponsor. And I'd like to thank Angela, my fiancée, for sticking with me. If it wasn't for her, we couldn't make this work. I'm also involved as the state chairman of USPA chairman for Georgia. It's a battle trying to put on meets. I'd like to thank Steve Dennison for letting me be a part of that organization.

Where can people follow your training and learn more about you? On Instagram @gogginsforce

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Gogginsforce.com

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